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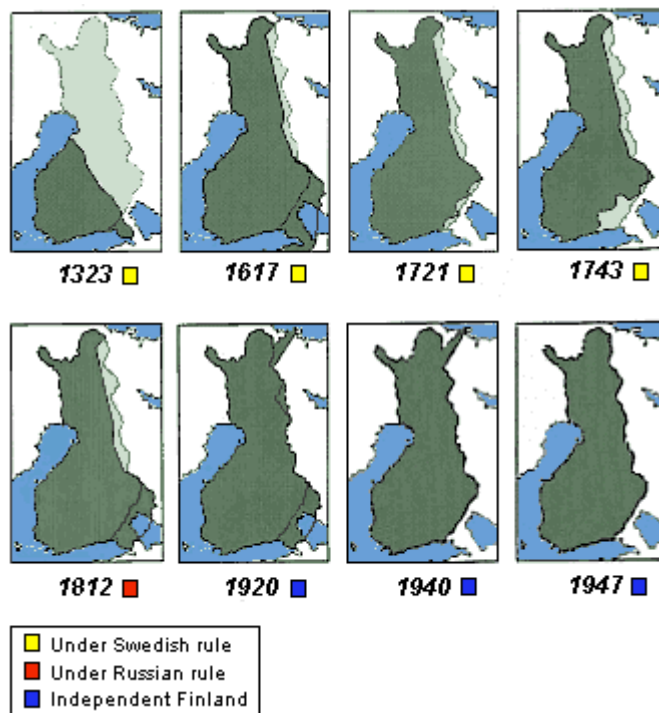
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Karelia: A Place of Memories and Utopias

Outi Fingerroos

Karelia is a vast inhabited area in northern Europe of historical significance to Finland,¹ Russia, and Sweden. In Finnish historiography, Karelia has often been described as a borderland or battlefield lying between East and West, and as a focal point. These labels date back to medieval times, when the East and the West, that is, Novgorod and Sweden, struggled for commercial and political power over the tribes that lived in the geographical area of Karelia. At the same time, this area was also the arena for a struggle that resulted in the coexistence there of two distinct religious traditions of Eastern and Western Europe until the Second World War.²

Map 1: Since the fourteenth century, the border in Karelia has been re-drawn about ten times. © The Finnish Karelian League

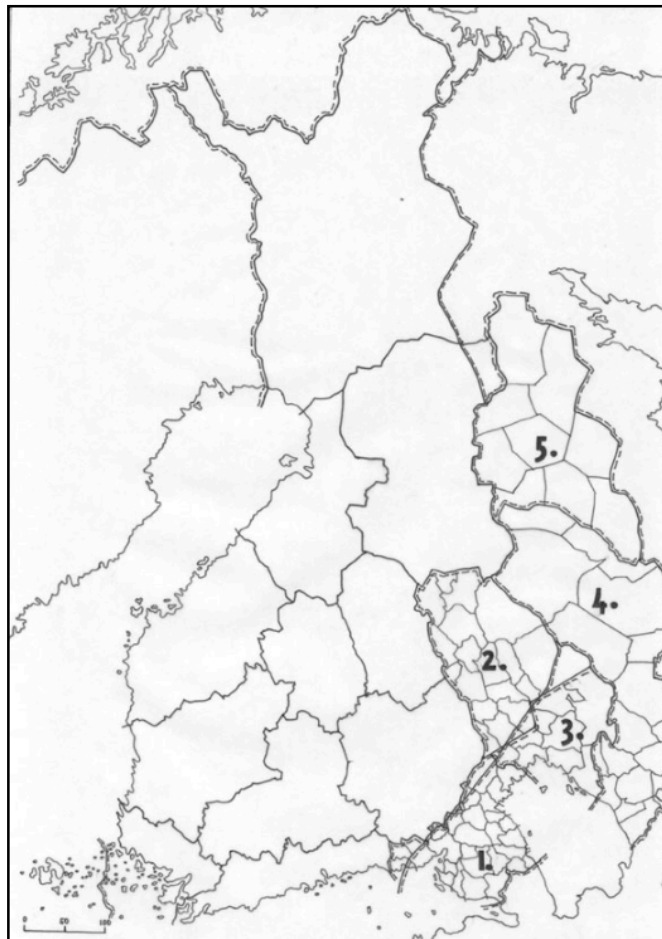


¹ Finland gained independence in 1917.

² See Fingerroos 2007a; Heikkinen 1989:16; Hämynen 1994:17-19; and Sallinen-Gimpl 1994:16-17.

Karelia is currently divided between the Russian Republic of Karelia, the Russian Leningrad Oblast, and two regions of Finland: South Karelia and North Karelia. There is also a Russian population living in many parts of the area. Some western parts of Karelia have never been on the Russian side of the border, whereas others have never been a part of Finland. Therefore, Karelia should be considered a heterogeneous area, parts of which are culturally connected to either Finland or Russia. This fact is also evident in the assigned names of Finnish and Russian Karelia. Both Karelias are further divided into several parts depending on the definition. The most commonly mentioned areas are the Karelian Isthmus (South Karelia), North Karelia, Ladoga Karelia (Border Karelia), Olonets Karelia, Dvina Karelia, and Tver Karelia (see Map 2). In total, Karelia has been given over forty definitions in different periods. The central defining feature of all these definitions has always been the border.³

Map 2: (1) The Karelian Isthmus (South Karelia); (2) North Karelia; (3) Ladoga Karelia (Border Karelia); (4) Olonets Karelia; (5) Dvina Karelia. © Outi Fingerroos



³ See Fingerroos 2007a; Heikkinen 1989:16; Hämynen 1994:17-19; and Sallinen-Gimpl 1994:16-17.

The historian Jason Lavery has mentioned that during the years 1939-45, Finland's place between East and West was never more visible or dangerous; indeed many other small countries in that position lost their independence during these years (2006:113). The Winter War of 1939-40 and the so-called Continuation War (1941-44) were both followed by the loss of large areas of borderland territory that were ceded to the Soviet Union in 1944. The surrendered areas (see Map 3) included the Karelian Isthmus, Ladoga Karelia, and Border Karelia, and in the north the areas of Kuolajärvi and Petsamo (Russian Pechenga). After the loss, a total of 430,000 evacuees, of whom 407,000 were Karelians, were resettled in different parts of Finland (Lavery 2006:130; Nevalainen 2001).

Map 3: Finnish areas ceded to Russia in 1944



The loss of Karelia to the Soviet Union marked the end of over a thousand years of Finnish settlement in the area. The resettlement and compensation of the Karelian evacuees placed a heavy burden on the country. The events of the war years also gave birth to the concepts of a “lost Karelia” and “Karelian evacuees” (the Karelian exiles) (Nevalainen 2001). In this

article I shall concentrate on the lost areas of Karelia, that is, Lagoda Karelia and the Isthmus, from 1917 onwards.

Different Utopias of Karelia

Karelianism has been seen as an idealistic interest in both science and art in Karelia, and particularly in Dvina Karelia and Olonets Karelia, that is to say in areas that lie completely on the Russian side (see further Sihvo 2003:11). This interest has its origins in the national epic poem of Finland, the *Kalevala*, compiled by Elias Lönnrot on the basis of Finnish and Karelian folk poems. Political Karelianism was born in an era when Finland was an autonomous grand duchy in the Russian Empire. The origins of Karelianism proper are usually dated to the 1880s, and it flourished particularly during the so-called “years of oppression” from 1899 onward. This movement had several political goals. In the earlier period (before 1910), it was more a question of autonomous rights and privileges within the Russian Empire (see Jussila 1999:56-60), while after 1909, the political goal of this movement was “the Finnish question,” that is, Finland’s independence (see *ibid.*:87-91), which was achieved in 1917. This heterogeneous and ill-defined movement united the Finnish intelligentsia in a broad way, since artists, students and collectors of folklore, natural scientists, and linguists all headed for Karelia, inspired by a nationalist spirit. In its extreme form, Karelianism developed into a movement aspiring to create a Greater Finland with Karelia as a part of it.

The Finnish literary scholar Hannes Sihvo wrote about a utopian Karelia and a Karelianist orient in his study *Karjalan kuva*.⁴ He observed that Karelianism has gone through a cycle of early development, a peak (in the 1890s), and a decline, and that it has its pre-classical, classical, and post-classical works (Sihvo 2003:407). According to Sihvo, there is a niche for Karelianism even today (cf. Haapanen 2001). I approach Sihvo’s utopian Karelianism—what I call the old utopia of Karelia—from the perspective of the exiles’ experiences and memory—what I call the new utopia of Karelia. I agree with Sihvo that Karelianism has manifested itself in various periods, and within the perspective of a hundred years it might have developed into a tradition. The old Karelianism was created by leading members of the Finnish intelligentsia in the nineteenth century, whereas this article concentrates on the evacuees’ memory and reminiscences as well as on some political discussions in independent Finland. However, I will show that Karelianism has been transformed: ideological Karelianism still exists, but new utopias are also reified in memories anchored in the experiences of the exiles.

My article focuses on the places of memory and utopias, on how a lost Karelia has been constructed as a utopian place in Finland after the wars of 1939-45. I start by defining the phrases “place of memory” and “utopias.” Because my methodology is based on oral history,⁵

⁴ Trans. “The Image of Karelia.”

⁵ The term “oral history” has not been translated into Finnish literally because research in this field has its own special characteristics in Finland. The Finnish term *muistitietotutkimus*, corresponding to the English concept “oral history,” means “research” (*tutkimus*) on “knowledge” (*tieto*) provided by “memories” (*muisti*) (Fingerroos and Haanpää 2006:26-27).

the terms place of memory and utopias derive their meaning from this tradition. It thus has a slightly different perspective than usual. I will present an interpretation of a utopian Karelia, which is defined on the one hand by the experience of place in exiles' reminiscences, and on the other hand by an ideological dream of the restoration of Karelia that persists in Finland.

The empirical part of my article comprises three different utopias of Karelia, which are examples of a living Karelian identity. First, I will present two predictions by a former fishmonger from Vyborg, Mikko Reponen, also known as "the Prophet of Karelia." His predictions gave hope to many exiles evacuated from the area of Vyborg.⁶ The Prophet of Karelia was a well-known citizen of Vyborg before the Winter War, and after the Continuation War he became one of the evacuees from Karelia. He was not widely known in Finland.

Another empirical source for my article is a book entitled *Sain Karjalan takaisin*⁷ (2003), written and published by an evacuee, Sirkka Pöysti from Helsinki. My idea is to capture a utopia realized by one evacuee from Karelia by describing how Pöysti returned to her birthplace in Ladoga Karelia. Karelian evacuees have been active writers of autobiographical texts and memoirs about the lost country. The utopias of exiles are the products of oblivion and vague and altered images. They include myths of the lost Karelia and narratives of individual heroism and survival in reconstructed Finland during the period of post-war reconstruction (Fingerroos 2007a).

Third, I will consider the ProKarelia movement's ideological utopia of the restoration of the lost territories (see ProKarelia 2007 <http://www.prokarelia.net/en/>) through a book entitled *Karjalan palautus*,⁸ written by an active member of the group, Veikko Saksi. The book represents the manifesto of ProKarelia, which describes itself as a free, grassroots movement. Its political program focuses on the restoration to the state of Finland of the ceded areas of Finnish Karelia, Petsamo and Salla, as well as some islands in the Gulf of Finland. These areas were surrendered to the Soviet Union as a consequence of the last war. In addition, ProKarelia aims at preserving and publicizing Karelian culture. It calls this mission "the Karelian question" (ProKarelia 2007). Most of the members of the ProKarelia movement are leading active exiles, but some Finnish professors and well-known artists, politicians, retired entrepreneurs, and company directors are also members of the movement. The movement's political goals are radical, and it is therefore shunned by the Finnish government, the President, the Finnish Karelian League, and many Karelian societies operating in Finland and abroad, which do not officially participate in the debate on the restoration of Karelia.

⁶ My source is Mikkonen 1967, which was issued by a publisher that specializes in prayer books, and it consists of memories and descriptions by evacuees from the Karelian Isthmus. Trans. "Mikko Reponen, The Prophet of Vyborg: The Apostle of Finland's Years of Destiny."

⁷ Trans. "I Got Karelia Back."

⁸ Trans. "The Restoration of Karelia."

Memories and Places

The content of the written source is independent of the researcher's need and hypotheses; it is a stable text, which we can only interpret. (Portelli 2002:70).

The memories used as a source in this article are texts and constructions, which my text reproduces, and which from an epistemological perspective are subjective reconstructions. In other words, my purpose is not to give information about true events of the past but to describe what the significance of these events was and still is—or is hoped to be—for the production of scientific knowledge (cf. Portelli 2002:67, 70). Therefore, as an oral historian, I am interested in the polyphony related to reminiscences of a place. I am looking neither for facts nor the truth about the past in oral history; rather, my purpose is to explore what those who recall the past wanted to do, what they believed in when they were doing it, or what they, in their own opinions, were doing at the time of their reminiscences and before (Portelli 2002:67-70).

Christopher Tilley (1994:10-17) has written about how *place* is a socially constructed expression that is an integrated part of people's everyday life. The interpretation of place includes both subjective and social dimensions, and place cannot be understood without them. In other words, the nature of place depends on the person who experiences it and the way he or she experiences it: a place does not exist without relations and is essentially restricted by the human vision and consciousness. In this article, place is understood as a construction that individuals and communities produce through speech and writing and creation in space.

Based on the same model of thinking, I also construct an analytical tool from the concept *place of memory* for myself. First, in my interpretation a place of memory is a construction, that is, a place (re)produced in reminiscences. Writing, speaking, and constructing are also means of producing places of memory. In addition, I use the concept of place of memory as an expression that includes both subjective and social dimensions, depending on whose perspective is active in the reminiscences.

In his book *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (2001), Pierre Nora explains the mechanisms through which the meanings of a phenomenon from the past—such as a place of memory—are re-created. Nora claims that, in the first phase, a monument symbolizes the particular phenomenon (*collective memory*) for which it has been erected. In the second phase, the monument becomes a place of memory that has been detached from its original purpose, and that carries the historical memory attached to it by those who have experienced it. For example, national holidays are celebrated in exactly the way we have been taught to celebrate them.⁹

The concept of *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory) in the French project differs from the Finnish concept of *muistin paikka* (place of memory), because Nora's original idea was to provide an ideological critique of the historical memory of a nation-state by using the term. However, Nora's interpretation attempt failed in its epistemology, since the process of *les lieux de mémoire* expanded in the way described above, and places of memory became myths for a nation-state and its historical memory (Parot 2005:500-03).

⁹ See Fingerroos 2004:387; cf. Nora 1996:6-7; and Nora 1998:636.

Nora's aim was to (re)interpret the French past critically. In Finnish cultural studies this dimension of the concept of place of memory has not been taken into account. In my own use, places of memory are constructions based on the traditions of oral history. A place of memory is first and foremost a construction produced in reminiscences. Therefore, I am interested in what meanings are attached to a place by the people who remember it, not in what kind of a manifestation of collective memory a place of memory is in itself.

Utopias Constructed by Memory

The word "utopia" comes from the Greek words *topos* and the negative *ou*. Therefore, the word "utopia" means a place that does not exist. It is on the one hand an impossible fantasy and on the other hand a romantic plan for the betterment of the world. Similarly, in the punning form "Eutopia" (from the Greek *eu*, "good" or "well") it can be an (unfulfilled) ideal society of some ideological school of thought. The starting points for the less comprehensive definition—as used by Thomas Moore, Francis Bacon, and Tommaso Campanella in their images of a perfect state—comply with the definitions given by dictionaries: a utopia is on the one hand a place that does not exist; on the other hand it is a place for happy people (Lahtinen 2002:169).

In its widest meaning, a utopia can mean almost any work or a way of thinking that includes some utopian element that refers to something beyond reality, i.e. a transcendent element. In my view, one of the basic conditions for a utopia to truly be a utopia is the fact that, despite its transcendent reference, it has been born in some real place and time and is therefore context-bound. It can be, for example, part of a social movement, or become an ideology or a design for an experimental society. In its extreme form, a utopia leads to reform or even to revolution (see further Levitas 1990:190; Lahtinen 2002:171-72).

Ernst Bloch (1959:258-88) is one of the most interesting post-World War II utopian thinkers because he tries to bridge the gap between utopian thinking and utopias existing in a certain historical reality (abstract and concrete forms). Earlier utopian literature mainly consisted of novels about islands and unrealistic plans to improve the world. Bloch associates anticipatory ideas with the concept of a concrete utopia and compensatory elements with that of an abstract utopia. Bloch's ideas are important because he demands valid "travel plans" and concreteness from utopian thinking. In other words, an abstract utopia should be transformed into a concrete utopia that can be used to answer the following questions: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is waiting for us? (Lahtinen 2002:222; Levitas 1990:88-90)

Three Utopian Visions of a Place Called Karelia

1. Mikko Reponen: Back to Karelia in Seventy Years

It was late summer in 1936. There was peace in the country, and people did not believe that any large-scale wars were looming. True, there was some fighting going on in Spain, but people thought that that, too, would gradually calm down.

In Vyborg, which was at that time the second largest city in Finland, people had gathered for a Sunday service in the cathedral. The Rev. Bertel Törmävaara was in the pulpit reading the lesson.

Then it happened: a short, bearded man stood up from his pew, walked to the aisle and shouted there in a firm, prophetic voice: “The destruction of Vyborg is near. In three years this temple will be demolished, and foreign troops will march through the streets of the town.”

Inevitably, this incident caused a great commotion. Quickly a number of people grabbed the man, and he was hurriedly taken out. Later he was accused of disturbing the church peace, although the preacher pleaded for his discharge.

News about this dreadful prediction was disseminated quickly around the country, and soon the name of the strange prophet, a fishmonger called Mikko Reponen, was known by everybody. (Fingerroos et al. 1999:7; Mikkonen 1967:36).¹⁰

Oral history, collected and published in a parish paper *Johannekselainen* in July 1964, offers a narrative about how this prophecy of 1936 was realized: the Cathedral of Vyborg was destroyed by bombing in the Winter War in February 1940, and Vyborg¹¹ fell in a major offensive in June 1944 to Finland’s eastern neighbor the Soviet Union. Finland finally lost Vyborg in the Paris Peace Treaty on 10 February 1947. After the fall of the city, attempts to recapture it and its adjacent areas failed, and the evacuation of people from the lost areas commenced (Häikiö 2005:1100).

The short, bearded man who made the prediction, Mikko Reponen, was a fishmonger who became a preacher in 1932, and who was best known among Karelian exiles by the sobriquet “the Prophet of Vyborg” after the war. Reponen’s roots were in the village of Revonsaari in Johannes,¹² where he was born on 18 June 1892. The family moved to Vyborg, where Mikko spent his childhood and adolescence, got married, and acquired a trade. Reponen became a preacher only in his later years, when deeply depressed after his wife’s death he experienced “a strong revival,” as he himself recalls (Mikkonen 1967:11):

Heaven opened, God glorified his Son Jesus and sent His Holy Ghost into my heart. I became a new creation. Jesus came to live and rule in my heart.

Oh that joy and bliss. Gloomy Mikko became a happy child of God, because ‘to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.’

¹⁰ This and all the following translations from the sources have been made by the present author.

¹¹ Vyborg is a city in Leningrad Oblast in Russia, situated in the Karelian Isthmus, 130 km. to the northwest of St. Petersburg and 38 km. south from Russia’s border with Finland.

¹² Johannes (Russian Sovetski) is a municipality near Vyborg.

Reponen was a powerful and hardworking preacher who was well known among Karelian exiles. He was refused access to Vyborg after the Winter War because it was feared that he would fan the flames of panic and fear among the Karelians (Mikkonen 1967:10). However, the flame of religion was strong, and he was not discouraged by setbacks. He toured widely through the relocation sites of exiles in southern Finland and wrote many letters to relatives and other members of his religion even after the second evacuation of Karelians after the Continuation War. In a letter written in Nurmes and dated 3 January 1947, this preacher addresses his native parish (Mikkonen 1967:59-60):

Dear members of the Cathedral Parish of Vyborg. I humbly ask for my name to be recorded in the church register of the Cathedral Parish of Vyborg for the year 1947: A former fishmonger, a traveling preacher and widower, Mikko Reponen, born in the village of Revonsaari in Johannes on 18 June 1892. Latest address: Tiurinkatu Street in Tammissuo.

I hope that God will bless Karelian émigré parishes and give you, in particular the Cathedral Parish, a merciful year. We are on a road of suffering imposed upon us by God, when the signs of the second coming of our Lord and Savior are becoming clearer and clearer. Soon, He who redeemed us with His divine blood on the Cross of Calvary will come and take His own to His glory. . . . But before that He who has power in heaven and on earth will take us, the exiled people of Karelia, back to our former homeland in Karelia. Those three iron gates that have prevented our return to Karelia—their time will soon be over. Read the beginning of the second chapter of the Book of the Prophet Habakkuk, where the Lord tells us that he will fulfill his promises.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and evermore.

This example illustrates the nature of Reponen's message: his sermons and letters frequently included a prophecy of returning to Karelia after the period of evacuation. Karelian newspapers and memoirs abound with descriptions and memories of Reponen's predictions: "We will get Karelia back in the end, but I have not been told the time. This time, it will be given as a present, not through war. And he said that Russia will be our friend, although it is an enemy" (Mikkonen 1967:30). For many Karelian exiles who believed in God, Mikko Reponen was a man who spoke the word of God and represented a serious religious struggle, and one who provided hope with his words in times of distress.

Reponen's utopian declaration also included a strong belief in his own return. In his sermons, he describes several times how he will be buried in Vyborg: "Mikko will once more walk the streets of Vyborg." However, Reponen contracted consumption in late 1948 and his condition weakened rapidly. As a consequence, his return to Karelia never materialized. He died in Härmä Sanatorium on 22 October 1951 and was buried in Ylihärmä (Mikkonen 1967:26-29, 37, 63).

2. *Sirkka Pöysti: I Got Karelia Back*

It is the beginning of July in 1993. A car stops in the center of a village, in the yard of a house that used to belong to some relatives. The house looks the same as it always did; the granary and part of the cowshed are still there. Lake Alasjärvi, serene and beautiful with its familiar shore, opens out before my eyes. The name of the village is Kujansuo. I walk a few steps and see on the other side of the field, high up on the hillside, my birthplace, my home. I walk through the gate to the field and sit down on a bank. A trembling cry escapes from deep within my soul, fifty years of pain and longing. (Pöysti 2003:4).

This is the beginning of a book called *Sain Karjalan takaisin*, or *I Got Karelia Back*, which was written by a retired émigré named Sirkka Pöysti from Helsinki, who realized her dream and built a summer cottage in Hiitola in 1995. Hiitola is a small municipality located halfway along the western coast of Lake Ladoga in Karelia. Pöysti acquired 15 acres of foreign soil for herself there. The process started with her sending an inquiry about a site to the village council of Hiitola and continued with her writing an official application in June 1994. A government ministry of the Republic of Karelia in Petrozavodsk handled the site application and granted a building license, after which a 50-year tenancy agreement was concluded in March 1995. Here is her description (9-10):

I chose as the site of the plot my home hill and the highest spot on the other side of the cape. It has a panoramic view over the narrower part of the lake. The field on the shore is suitable for taking garden soil. I was also convinced that this site for a house had been waiting for me for fifty years.

The book itself consists of Pöysti's reminiscences—how she experienced her return home, what kind of cultural differences and people she met in the area as well as what had happened to her over the intervening years. Pöysti displays an admirable openness towards everything new and different in her writing. She is interested in the Russian history, economy, and administration of the place. Pöysti's birthplace is owned by a doctor's family who speak some English, and the relationship was clearly rewarding for both parties. Pöysti describes meetings with this family in her book, how several generations have adopted the site, and how her own task is to give information about the Finnish history of the place: "In general, Russian youth are not yet familiar with the past of Karelia. Only a new writing of history could improve this situation" (22).

In Pöysti's book the past and the future of the place enter into a dialogue, which forces the Karelian exiles into a reappraisal of the situation. Her approach to writing resembles the goals of Finnish-Russian research on the area: place narratives based on reminiscences are compared with each other, and the results are presented to the public. For example, the researcher Ekaterina Melnikova (2005) from the European University at Saint Petersburg has written about how the population of Russian Karelia describes the Finnish period of the place. The term *rodina*, or native country, is for the Russian inhabitants a signifier of both partial belonging and knowledge of one's roots produced in the form of narrative. Defining *rodina* is a

continuing process, which is ongoing among the Russian population of Karelia. Pöysti describes the same issue in her own narrative of experience:

Unfortunately, there are many Karelians who have been gripped by old animosities. Fears, bitterness, and suspicion deriving from the past corrode some people's minds. It is difficult for people who were transferred to Karelia to understand that the present generation was born there. But they [the present generation] know hardly anything about the past. The elderly people who came after the Finns left have nostalgic memories of a beautiful and well-kept Karelia that has gradually fallen into decay. Their experiences and sorrows are the same as those of the Finns who want to take their children and grandchildren to search for their roots in their lost native region. (55).

In an analytical sense, the most interesting aspect of her book is how the concepts of place, utopia, and place of memory are located. Sirkka Pöysti's Karelia is situated in a Hiitola of memories, in a place where an old house still stands and in a landscape that has been permanently engraved in Pöysti's mind. This site continues to draw her, and her return is like a pilgrimage, on which her soul is looking for peace:

The old kitchen and bedroom are the same as they used to be. In that little bedroom I first saw the light of day. My father told me that there was so little snow in January the year I was born that he had to go and get the midwife with a horse carriage. The striking and heartwarming *lake scenery* that opens up from the window of the little bedroom *was engraved into my heart permanently when I was a child*. It became the landscape of my soul that did not leave me alone. *It draws me constantly and requires me to return on a kind of pilgrimage in search of peace for my soul*. (9, emphasis added).

I have often used the terms "pilgrimage" and "generational experience" (Fingerroos 2007a; Lehto and Timonen 1993) when I describe how Karelian exiles are united by the time they lived in the Isthmus, the war, and the time of exile. The experiences of this generation were so strong that they are cherished by reminiscences and, for example, in pilgrimages to Karelia, now a remote place for them. Further, the knowledge related to the place is mediated for children and grandchildren in narration. This is how the exiles' own *Karelia of memories* becomes familiar as a *Karelia of narratives* to their descendants (Fingerroos 2004:18-19; Lehto and Timonen 1993:90-92).

However, Sirkka Pöysti defies the limits of time and place in a much stronger way in her book. If we start with the notion that a utopia is *ou-topos*, a place which does not exist, and in addition endow it with the attributes of being dreamlike, systematic, idealistic and unfulfilled, Karelia is indeed an ideal, utopian community or world. However, Pöysti has crossed the limits of the definition of *ou-topos* by building a home in this happy place:

As the work was being finished off, *I could already stay overnight under my own roof*. The furniture was partly fetched from the furniture factory in Käkisalmi in the following spring, partly delivered by the village shopkeeper from Lahdenpohja. Seen from the lake, *the front of*

the house rises proudly high on the hill as if it were an omen of Karelia's reconstruction and new florescence. (11, emphasis added).

At the beginning of this article, I defined places of memory as reproduced places; this reproduction takes place in reminiscences by writing, speaking, and here physically constructing. Pöysti's house in Hiitola exists both in a place and in a utopia. On the one hand, a house construction project does not fit the definitions of the term "utopia" as a non-place, since the actual cottage denies a utopia and comes close to being a place. In Pöysti's words, a utopia in the sense of an ideal place is only approaching, because the new cottage is an omen of Karelia's reconstruction and new florescence. From the perspective of place, Pöysti's project appears to be too ideal and lyrical, because Alasjärvi is a place where people go to and come back from—generally, the whole of Karelia is the destination of pilgrimages. Therefore, the home located in Karelia is a place of memory that has been reproduced in the present; it is as lyrical and light as summer:

You can enjoy the warmth of midsummer only after cold periods. "The weather" changes in life as well. There are times of joy and of sadness and periods of success and of hardship.

Returning to Karelia has been a great gift to me When I go to Alasjärvi in the spring, the cranes and swans have already arrived. We start our return journey at the same time in the autumn—I and the birds. (62).

3. Veikko Saksi and ProKarelia: The Restoration of Karelia

With Return of Karelia—The Karelian Reform Plan, ProKarelia wishes to draw the serious attention of politicians, civil servants, the media and the general public to the aspect of the Karelian issue which remains open, that is, peaceful return of the ceded territories to Finland through negotiation (Reenpää 2001).

After the Continuation War, most active Karelian evacuees and some Finnish leaders hoped that it would be possible to return to the ceded areas. Overtures were made to the Soviet leaders, and the question was also raised at the Paris Peace Conference in 1946. However, the new border remained unchanged, and throughout the 1950s and 1960s the question of Karelia was an unofficial topic of discussion at meetings between President Urho Kekkonen of Finland and the Soviet leaders. During the period of Soviet stagnation under Brezhnev, the whole question was buried. In the 1990s Karelia returned to the newspaper headlines and public debate in Finland, but the leaders of Finland and Russia have repeatedly stated that there are no outstanding border disputes or territorial claims between the two countries (Nevalainen 2001).

In Finland there has been no progress at the government level on the possible return of Karelia, but public discussion of the question is currently very lively. The debate on the issue picked up in Finland at the end of the 1990s. The ProKarelia movement's roots can be found there.

Figure: The logo of the ProKarelia movement



Veikko Saksi is one of the leaders of the ProKarelia movement. His *Karjalan palautus*,¹³ published in 2005, represents the official manifesto of ProKarelia. The aim of this book is to give correct, factual information on what the effects would be were Karelia to be returned to Finland. It considers that the general public and decision-makers around the world should be given the chance to form their own views and judgments on the basis of the relevant information (Reenpää 2001).

The author himself writes in the preface that his work “is a general account and at the same time ProKarelia’s stance on open questions.” These open questions are totalitarian aggression and crimes committed by the Soviet Union, which, according to Saksi, should be acknowledged when a new kind of relationship with Russia is formed. In Saksi’s view, the Finns experienced these deeds after the war so deeply that about 40 percent of the Finns support the restoration of Karelia. In addition, the Weapons Cache Case,¹⁴ war indemnities, and the rights of the evacuees have not been dealt with so far. Therefore, if Finland does not make a move to repair these wrongs the accusations directed at Finland during the war will not be reinterpreted. In Saksi’s view, the whole political leadership, including the President, government ministers, and members of parliament, is sidestepping responsibility over this issue.

Above all, this book wants to activate discussion about these questions among politicians and citizens in Finland. It is not yet time to present Russia with negotiation initiatives. First all the related issues and their effects have to be studied thoroughly. We also have to look for support for our views from the EU and the USA. We are sending a completely wrong message to the world if we remain passive and wait for the initiative to come from Russia. (Saksi 2005:10-11).

The book consists of six chapters. The chapters on “The Background of Restoration” and “The Consequences of Totalitarianism” provide background, exploring, for example, the terms and documents of peace and describing the totalitarianism practiced by the Soviet Union. Finland

¹³ Trans. “The Restoration of Karelia.”

¹⁴ The Weapons Cache Case was a secret military operation following the Continuation War, whereby a large amount of Finnish Army equipment was hidden away around the country. See further Nevakivi 1999:223-24.

is seen as the loser in terms of casualties, loss of territories, and economic costs. The chapter on “The Implementation of Restoration” is the core of the book. It charts the present state of Karelia and presents arguments and possibilities for restoration and how it should be implemented. The book also provides figures and solid statistics to argue for the restoration and constructs utopias that preclude totalitarianism: ProKarelia’s vision, the values of Karelia will be changed, the economy will prosper, and it will be integrated into the West. The book ends with the presentation of the communities promoting the restoration.

Even the author states that the book should not be considered an academic work because it makes no references to academic research. Rather, it is based on “numerous discussions about the restoration of Karelia and many other things among a variety of people.” It is Saksi’s wish that the book should find its way to ministries, research institutes, and schools. And the implications are significant: “if these issues are not settled, we will always remain in debt to the veterans of our wars, to those who constructed this country as well as to the future generation” (11).

Karelia has always been an essential part of Finnish nationalism. It is a site for both revolutionary and peaceful nationalism, and it has been regarded as the source of both the mythical past and benefits to the country as a whole. According to this ideology, Finland constitutes an epicenter and Karelia is located in the periphery. The Finnish folklorist Pertti J. Anttonen (2005:138-43) has written that national Finnish mythology and history have been constructed from a variety of defense situations and the myths about them. Karelians take the role of the Other, against whom the Finns are compared.

When speaking about utopias related to Karelia, it is imperative to refer to Y. O. Ruuth’s work, *Karjalan kysymys vuosina 1917–1920: Katsaus Karjala-kysymyksen poliittiseen luonteeseen*,¹⁵ published in 1921. In this book the Karelian Question is formulated as a political, mental, and economic problem: “The educational level cannot be improved without economic progress; economic prosperity cannot be improved without mental agility and fortitude” (18). The core of this constitutes Finland’s interests in Karelia:

Does Finland benefit from the fact that Finnish businesses get raw materials from Karelia and driving power from its rapids for new factories or from the fact that the Finnish state will get paid in goods in the form of logs for even the smallest help given to Karelians or from the fact that Karelian people will develop into an affluent, civilized, and politically conscious people in a short period of time? (Ruuth 1921:8).

When this definition, which is over 80 years old, is compared to the essence of Veikko Saksi’s book *Karjalan palautus*, a remarkable resemblance can be detected in the rhetoric. The message given to the reader is crystalized in the question of Karelia’s interests: Finland can provide Karelia with economic and educational benefits. In fact, Saksi’s and ProKarelia’s vision goes even further, since according to Saksi Finland has moral and ethical grounds for demanding a re-evaluation of the terms of peace of World War II. This process should be implemented in

¹⁵ Trans. “The Karelian Question 1917-1920: A Review of the Political Nature of the Karelian Question.”

phases so as to unload “the historically weighty burden” by restoring territories and by paying a variety of expenses.

The starting point for this design for the restoration of Karelia combines both moral and ethical goals and purely economic interests. It is of that utmost importance that Finland and Russia review the historically deep burden between the countries together. The dismantling of moral and ethical tensions will take place by restoring the territories wrongly taken and by agreeing on the payments to cover the deparation and Finland’s expenses. (152).

Saski goes on:

In economic terms, we can call this our vision because it has a far-reaching and great effect: good-neighborliness and friendship between Finland and Russia. These actions are best described as a long-term period of phased actions. The vision should be implemented on the basis of a strategy of peaceful negotiations, for which the point of departure is a win-win situation. This tactic includes the wide dissemination of information about the issue. It is important for Finland that the court decisions on war criminals and the arms cache be reversed beforehand. (152-53).

The discussion about the restoration of Karelia shows that there is a call in Finland for nationalistic rhetoric about Karelia. In fact, Veikko Saksi’s and ProKarelia’s vision can easily be defined as political nationalism, since they depend on Finland’s omnipotence: “It will bring vigor and prosperity to the eastern part of Finland and northwestern Russia. This process will help to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in Karelia” (ProKarelia 2007).

This utopian rhetoric has irritated a lot of people in Finland. Typically, on 28 May 2005, the Finnish newspaper *Karjala* wrote about how the Finnish Post Office rejected an idea by Heikki M. Uusilehto to have a series of stamps made for his own use with an image of the pre-war Finnish-Russian frontier defined in the Peace Treaty of Tartu (1920). The Finnish Post Office argued in its rejection that a map is not a suitable motif for a stamp because the regulations forbid national and social emblems.

Karelia as a Place of Memory and Utopia

The Finnish social scientist Mikko Lahtinen writes that because the present is characterized by global interdependency and inequality, utopias are very different from what they used to be over a hundred years ago. Life is not free, safe, equal, or self-derivative for people. Perhaps this dire situation in the twenty-first century will also produce utopias of hope some day—or at least rhetoric about what is missing. It might be that there will have to be increasingly serious crises and “learning the hard way” before this happens. However, the crises should not be so severe that people will lose hope entirely. Positive illusions about the future will remain mere abstract utopias if the alternatives presented in them do not include a theoretically

valid analysis of existing reality and the terms and conditions required to change it (Lahtinen 2002:229-30).

I have a different view: we live in the middle of utopias, and these utopias have changed into concrete principles of hope, as assumed in the classic work *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* by Ernst Bloch (1959). Utopias live in their strongest form in the discussion about the restoration of Karelia. ProKarelia calls this mission “the Karelian Question” and states that “an econometric model” of the restoration would delineate the benefits accruing to Russia from the restoration of Karelia to Finland in detail. The most concrete form of this mission has taken the form of an international popular appeal: “Over 130,000 people from 90 countries and 40 states of the USA have signed the appeal” (ProKarelia 2006).

The lost Karelia takes a specific shape in exiles’ memories and hopes, the content of which is not affected by global interdependency at all. In addition, memories and utopias located in Karelian exiles’ minds are different from national and political utopias because they are closely connected with the *experience* of losing a place. Therefore, Sirkka Pöysti (2003:63) feels that she is like a migratory bird that constructs and operates in this moment but never finds its real home: “I suppose we humans are also migratory birds; we do not always know where our real home exists. However, our teacher Luther gave some advice which is still applicable: ‘I know nothing of tomorrow, but today I am going to plant an apple tree.’ ”

On the other hand, Viljo Huunonen (1998:153-54), who was born in the village of Uuras in Johannes, acknowledges the fact that the world has changed: “If the surrender of territories had never taken place and we still lived in Karelia, we would face the same kind of problems there as elsewhere in Finland.” However, he does not reject his experience: “Pondering these things does not wipe out the feeling of losing a familiar place and home. The injury caused by this loss is so deep in this people that it will take generations before it is healed. I wonder whether it ever will be.”

As Giorgio Agamben (1993) has observed, we can only have hope in what is without consolation, and the world would be without consolation if we could understand it as it is. Mikko Reponen first predicted the gloomy fate of Karelia, but then gave hope for its restoration in his later prophecies. As a consequence, *loss* and *hope* are key concepts in reminiscences related to Karelia. These concepts are located in human minds and have a relation to places and times before the border was agreed on in the Paris Peace Treaty. Different expressions about the absent place describe two aspects of experience: memories located in the past and utopias located in the future. The present provides a threshold between these two. However, there is no direct parallel between the threshold of the present and the border. The chairman of the Johannes Society, Paavo Väntsi, invited people to the event in the society’s newsheet as follows:

The festival has been like a bridge to the past. The lost native district with its memories, experiences of the evacuation, Karelian culture, and the work of earlier generations have characterized the festival in a variety of ways over the decades. (2003, emphasis added).

However, the purpose of the festival has not only been to look back. The goal has also been to create a bond between people who were born in Johannes and who are now scattered all over Finland. The festival has also provided an opportunity to meet relatives and acquaintances

and to hear how things are going. Personal memories of the native village have been rekindled as memories have been shared. *The bridge also reaches into the future*. In the festival we also try to see what lies ahead.

I am optimistic that the twenty-first century will provide as fruitful a context for utopias as the years after World War II or the social rupture in the nineteenth century. The recollection of the lost Karelia and the hope of its restoration are living, present-day utopian ideas. Karelian exiles' utopias are constructions resembling memory: they are not necessarily true as facts, but they are meaningful for the people who recall them. The Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi¹⁶ has written that on the one hand the exiles' utopias are multidimensional, evocative, and ideal, and therefore may have only a superficial connection with the reality of the lost Karelia. On the other hand, utopias become particularly charged in regard to places, that are invested with hopes and dreams by those who reminisce about them. As a consequence, utopias attached to place by Karelian exiles are different from the Karelianists' ideological dreams; they are personal, experienced, intimate, and familiar. In them, an abstract utopia has been transformed into a concrete utopia.

University of Jyväskylä

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¹⁶ See 1988:9-11, 17, 29; also Paasi 1996.

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